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ABSTRACT

Types of questions that serve to stimulate and develop social studies discussions are introduced and illustrated. Teachers are given suggestions on how to use questioning to help students develop social studies knowledge and skills. Three important phases of discussion include: the initiation phase, which indicates the purpose of the discussion; the development phase, which allows elaboration and comparison of ideas; and the synthesis, or concluding phase. Six types of questions can be useful within discussions. Questions that call for creative expression and judgment provide focus and stimulate interest and thought. Personal belief/experience questions and comprehension questions which call for inferencing and hypothesizing are effective in initiating discussion. Comprehension, creative expression, and judgment questions are useful in synthesis. Follow-up questions are useful in all phases. To achieve greatest effectiveness, a questioning strategy should be employed. Strategies provide a sequence of interrelated questions intended to facilitate attainment of specific learning goals. In stimulating and maintaining student participation in productive dialogue, teachers also must be aware of techniques in moderating, pacing, and reacting to student responses. (Author/AV)

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Using Questions in Social Studies

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Approximately how many questions do you ask in a typical class period? Why do you ask questions of your students? What are some other reasons? How would you characterize the types of questions you ask? Which type(s) do you ask most frequently?

These questions¹ are intended to encourage you to begin examining your questioning practices. Note that each of the questions refers to *asking* questions. This is how we usually think about questions. That is, we ask questions and, we hope, our students answer them.

Instead, we might think about *using* questions. Using questions as tools to help our students learn has important implications for both teaching and learning. One implication is that questions (and answers) are not necessarily ends in themselves but means toward larger goals, such as concept formation, skill development, and decision-making. Another implication is that questioning strategies (planned sequences of interrelated questions), rather than spontaneous, discrete questions, would be employed.

Although all of the evidence is not yet in, our questioning practices do seem to have an impact on what and how much students learn. Questions are an integral part of most teaching strategies, from structured recitation to open-ended inquiry. Much class time—about 30 per cent—is spent in oral questioning (asking, answering, and reacting). Research findings also indicate that social studies teachers typically ask more than two questions per minute.²

¹Questions are not always interrogative statements. A question might be described as a communication (oral, print, gesture) that solicits a response from another individual.

²Meredith D. Gall, "The Use of Questions in Teaching," *Review of Educational Research* 40 (December 1970): 707-721.

Whether the time spent in questioning is well spent depends on several factors, including the type and sequence of questions, the pace of questioning, and the nature of teacher reactions to student responses. Current evidence suggests that, through the use of effective questioning practices, teachers can facilitate (a) knowledge acquisition and comprehension, (b) skill development, (c) decision-making, and (d) creative thinking. Further, effective questioning can encourage positive attitudes toward learning and the social studies. In addition, since teachers' questioning practices serve as models for students, students are likely to learn to be more effective questioners.¹ This last point is of particular importance since future out-of-school learning requires question-asking as much as or more than it does answering others' questions.

Effective social studies questioning most often occurs within the context of discussion activities. In the following sections, types of questions that serve to stimulate and develop social studies discussions are introduced and illustrated. Then, examples of special-purpose questioning strategies are presented, followed by general guidelines for increasing the effectiveness of discussion activities. Finally, a selected bibliography is provided for further information about these and related topics.

Using Questions in Social Studies Discussions

Discussion might be described as a face-to-face dialogue between two or more people in which information and beliefs are shared in order to reach a common goal.

Discussions differ from recitations in several respects, including purpose, frequency and type of questions, and communication pattern. Recitation is a means of reviewing factual information or assessing students' recall of previously presented information. Memory questions are predominant, and the question-answer exchange tends to be rapid. In the typical recitation, the communication pattern between teacher and students resembles a pair of one-way streets. Questions move in one direction, from teacher to student, and answers in the other, from student to teacher. Student questions are infrequent.

In contrast, discussion is more flexible and can serve diverse purposes. Varied types of questions are employed. While there is more variety in the type of questions used in discussion, the number of questions is usually fewer than in a recitation. Since many of the questions used in discussion are open-ended, having more than one possible answer, a single question might generate several answers. Further, there are multiple patterns of communication in discussion, with both teacher and students asking and answering each other's questions. Texts and other resources are used not only as information sources but as take-off points for further questioning.

Phases in Discussion

Productive social studies discussions require the use of different types of questions. Questions differ in the kinds of thinking they prompt and in the functions they serve. Which questions (or questioning strategies) are most appropriate depends on several factors, including the goal and phase of the discussion. Some types of questions are more effective during the initiation phase, while others

are better suited to the development and synthesis phases.

The initiation phase of discussion is intended to arouse interest and indicate the purpose of the discussion. When students know what is expected of them and are motivated to participate, discussion is more likely to be productive. Discussion can be effectively initiated by a single question or by a brief presentation followed by a question. In either case, it is important that the opening question be clearly phrased and open-ended.

The development phase is the body of the discussion and usually the longest segment. During this time, ideas generated in the initiation phase are elaborated, refined, compared, and evaluated. Alternatives are sought if initial ideas are found inadequate, and additional information is introduced as needed to test hypotheses.

The synthesis is the concluding phase of the discussion. During this phase, conclusions are reached, generalizations are formulated, decisions are made, or plans (for application or action) are designed.

Types of Questions in Social Studies

Social studies questions can be divided into six types: personal belief/experience, memory, comprehension, creative expression, judgment, and follow-up. Some types of questions can be used more effectively in one phase of discussion than in another. Comprehension, creative expression, judgment, and follow-up questions are appropriate to all three phases. Personal belief/experience questions are more appropriate in the initiation and development than in the synthesis phase, while memory questions are usually suitable only in the development phase.

• *Personal belief/experience questions.* These questions request that individuals relate their own experiences, feelings, opinions, or preferences. No rationale or justification is expected or required, and there are no right or wrong answers. By eliciting students' beliefs and experiences, these questions provide data for concept development, as well as feedback regarding students' attitudes and interests. They also aid in increasing interest, attention, and participation by personalizing social studies, drawing on students' own experiences and relating them to the topic under consideration.

Examples of personal belief/experience questions include:

1. How would you feel about moving to an unfamiliar neighborhood? 2. What happened after you lost your books and lunch money? 3. In which of these ancient cultures would you have preferred to live? 4. What are some ways in which government directly affects you?

• *Memory questions.* These questions ask for the recall of information previously presented by the teacher and textbook or acquired from other sources. Memory questions solicit simple repetition of information in its original form. They typically have only one right answer. The desired response may be a single word, a brief phrase, a listing of items, or an extended narrative.

Memory questions have relatively limited usefulness in discussion. Exclusive or even predominant use of memory questions would yield only superficial social studies knowledge and fail to promote skill development, decision-making, or creativity. Also, memory questions tend to block discussion when they suggest conclusions desired by the teacher or, in effect, ask students to "tell me

¹Catherine Cornbleth, *Toward Effective Teacher Questioning Strategies* (Fair Lawn, N.J.: JAB Press, 1976), cassette tape; Meredith D. Gall and Joyce P. Gall, "The Discussion Method," in *The Psychology of Teaching Methods*, ed. N. L. Gage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

what the textbook says.¹⁰ However, the judicious use of memory questions might assist the development phase of a discussion when factual information is needed to (a) form a base from which inferences can be drawn, (b) clarify a situation or a sequence of events, or (c) provide data for testing hypotheses. When the teacher asks memory questions in these instances, the questions serve what is essentially an assessment function; that is, the teacher uses memory questions to determine whether at least some students possess pertinent background information. If they do, their information would be shared with the other members of the group. If students do not have the information, the teacher would provide or otherwise help the students obtain it and then reopen the discussion.

Examples of memory questions include:

1. Which is the most populous state in the United States?
2. What are three different types of pollution?
3. When were automobiles first used on a regular basis in the United States?
4. In what sequence did these revolutions occur? (American, Chinese, French, Mexican, Russian)

• *Comprehension questions.* These questions ask for reasoning or information processing, such as comparing and contrasting, relating, identifying, classifying, inferring, hypothesizing, and generalizing. Comprehension questions can also involve interpreting data (by translating, paraphrasing, or explaining); distinguishing examples of a concept or phenomenon; applying ideas in new situations; analyzing data; organizing, reorganizing, and summarizing.¹¹ Comprehension questions can have one best answer but, unlike memory questions, there is rarely only one right answer.

Comprehension questions play a particularly important role in knowledge acquisition and concept formation, skill development, and decision-making. They often are the key questions in the development phase of discussion. In using comprehension questions to encourage thinking, it is important to note that what is intended as a comprehension question might in fact be only a memory question if answers have been provided earlier and students are expected merely to repeat previously presented information. For example, asking students to identify differences between life in eighteenth century English and Spanish America is a memory question if such differences have been reviewed earlier. However, if students have previously studied but not compared the two colonial societies, then it would qualify as a comprehension question. Thus, the context as well as the substance of a question affects the type of thinking likely to be generated.

Examples of comprehension questions include:

1. According to these maps, which areas have a climate suitable for growing citrus crops?
2. What conclusions can be drawn from the data we have collected about voter participation in local, state, and national elections?
3. What evidence of cultural lag is apparent in this case study?
4. On the basis of what we have studied about attitude formation, what might be some ways of minimizing prejudice?

• *Creative expression questions.* These questions ask for the construction or reconstruction of a new and different

pattern; that is, the formulation of a novel proposal, product, or performance. While the outcome is new for the individual, it need not be unique in an historical or global sense. Creative expression questions often pose hypothetical situations and ask students how they might respond, a sort of verbal role-playing. Or they might request the production of oral, written, graphic, or dramatic communications, which can take any number of forms, including essays, collages, theories, and models. Creative expression questions are useful in brainstorming, forecasting, and expanding the range of alternatives for consideration, as well as in synthesizing information and beliefs.

Responding to a creative expression question involves thinking and feeling, combining ideas, experiences, and attitudes in some personally meaningful and satisfying way. It is this individualized or personalized aspect of creative expression that distinguishes it from comprehension. While both involve information processing, creative expression also incorporates individuality and imagination.

Examples of creative expression questions include:

1. How would you account for the recurring reports of UFO sightings and contacts with non-human beings?
2. Construct a plan for an ideal city. How would it look, sound, and smell?
3. If you were President of the United States, what would be your energy policy?
4. How might what is now the United States have developed differently if exploration and settlement had begun from the west instead of the east?

• *Judgment questions.* These questions ask for an evaluation of the worth, importance, merit, goodness, appropriateness, effectiveness, or efficiency of an idea, event, action, object, or individual. They go beyond personal belief/experience questions by asking for the criteria or standards used in making the judgment and the evidence that supports it. Criteria and evidence are sought either in the initial question or in follow-up questions. (Thus, a personal belief/experience question becomes a judgment question when it is followed by a request for justification. Also, judgment questions may be viewed as a special case of creative expression in which one is asked to reach and justify a personal value decision.)

Judgment questions encourage rational conflict resolution and decision-making by involving students in examining alternatives and basing conclusions on relevant data. While judgment questions have no one right answer, all judgments are not equal; a position is only as strong as the reasoning and evidence that support it.

Examples of judgment questions include:

1. Which of these proposals is most likely to be effective in solving our local housing problems? (What is the basis for your decision?)
2. Agree or disagree with the following quotation from Carl Schurz's speech in the Senate, January 17, 1872, indicating the reasons and evidence that support your position: "Our country, right or wrong. When right, to be kept right; when wrong, to be put right."
3. What is the best location for a new community recreation center? (How did you arrive at that conclusion?)
4. Which twentieth-century invention has had the most impact on our way of life? (What criteria are you using to judge impact? What is the evidence supporting your decision?)

• *Follow-up questions.* These questions seek to develop responses, usually by requesting elaboration, clari-

¹⁰For further differentiation of cognitive levels, comprehension questions can be subdivided to distinguish Sanders' categories of translation, interpretation, application, and analysis. See Norris M. Sanders, *Classroom Questions: What Kinds?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

fication, or justification of the original statements. While we occasionally follow up incomplete, partial, or inappropriate student responses (or no response) by rephrasing questions or providing clues, probing adequate responses is less common. We tend to move too quickly to another question or student, thus missing opportunities to develop ideas and to encourage thoughtful inquiry and reflection. Productive discussion depends in large part on the use of follow-up questions to increase the scope and quality of participation.³

Follow-up questions can request further information or implications (elaboration), specification, explanation, examples (clarification), or criteria and evidence on which conclusions are based (justification). In addition, justification follow-up questions can suggest consequences, alternatives, or apparent contradictions for consideration. Some examples of justification follow-up questions are indicated in parentheses following the sample judgment questions presented earlier.

Additional examples of follow-up questions include:

1. What else happened? 2. What would be an example of chauvinism? 3. Why is that important to you? 4. How would you summarize what you have just said?

While the use of follow-up questions is strongly recommended, two qualifications should be noted. First, follow-up questions might be seen as threatening by some students. They might become reluctant to respond to any question, fearing that all of their responses would be challenged by the teacher. This possibility can be minimized, in part, by the manner in which follow-up questions are asked. For instance, depending on our tone of voice and facial expression, "What do you mean by that?" can communicate "How could you say something so stupid!"—a rhetorical non-question—or "I'm interested in what you're saying but I don't quite understand."

A second possible misuse of follow-up questions occurs when the teacher becomes so involved in an extended dialogue with one student that others lose interest. While it is often desirable to pursue a line of reasoning to explore an idea fully, it is also desirable to maintain the attention and involvement of most, if not all, of the group. To accomplish both goals, one or two follow-up questions might be directed to one student, with additional follow-up questions directed to others.

All of these six types of questions can be useful in the development phase of a social studies discussion. Questions that call for creative expression and judgment are likely to be effective discussion openers because they provide focus and tend to stimulate interest and thought. Similarly, personal belief/experience questions and comprehension questions that call for inferences or hypothesizing are likely to be able to initiate discussion effectively. Comprehension, creative expression, and judgment questions are probably the most appropriate types of questions to use during the synthesis phase. Follow-up questions are not only useful in all phases, but seem to be crucial to the success of the discussion as a whole.

Sample: Initiating Discussion

Imagine that your social studies classes have been studying ancient cultures and are about to begin an inves-

³See Roger T. Cunningham, "Developing Question-Asking Skills," in *Developing Teacher Competencies*, ed. James E. Weigand (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971). This is also a useful source on phrasing questions to eliminate problems such as ambiguity, wordiness, limited choice, and leading.

tigation of the disintegration of the Roman Empire. In addition to expecting your students to acquire information about why the Roman Empire broke up, you expect them to develop their hypothesizing skill and to expand their understanding of a concept: multiple causation. You plan to begin with a discussion that will help students attain these goals. After presenting the following introductory statement, which of the questions listed below would you select to initiate such a discussion?

"Yesterday, we left the Roman Empire at the height of its power and accomplishment. From our timeline, we know that it collapsed during the fifth century."

1. What was the immediate cause of the fall of the Roman Empire?
2. How would you have felt as a Roman citizen knowing that your empire was collapsing?
3. What are some reasons why an empire as large and prosperous as Rome's might disintegrate?
4. If you had been the Roman Emperor in the middle of the fifth century, what would you have done to try to save your empire?
5. To what extent do you believe that the end of the Roman Empire in the fifth century was deserved?

Question 3, a comprehension question, is my choice. Consistent with the purposes of the discussion, it calls for inferences based on prior knowledge and indicates that there is more than one possible cause. Also, use of the phrase "might disintegrate," instead of "would disintegrate" or simply "fell," encourages hypothesizing because it suggests that the teacher is seeking plausible ideas, not looking for just one answer. In contrast, question 1, a memory question, presumably has only one acceptable answer, and, therefore, is unlikely to stimulate discussion.

Questions 2 and 5, personal belief/experience and judgment questions respectively, are likely to generate discussion, but they are not directly relevant to the discussion's purpose. If the discussion was intended to encourage empathy or decision-making, then these questions might be effective openers. Question 4, a creative expression question, seems most appropriate for synthesizing the discussion. After considering reasons why the Roman Empire broke up, students could explore ways in which the empire's disintegration might have been avoided or postponed.

Questioning Strategies

A questioning strategy is a purposeful sequence of interrelated questions intended to facilitate attainment of specific learning goals. While the key questions are preplanned and intended to be used in a specified order, effective strategies are flexible and open-ended. Varied types of questions are employed, pacing is variable, and outcomes are not predetermined. The combination of structure and openness contributes significantly to their effectiveness as discussion guides.⁴

To indicate the range of alternatives, two different questioning strategies are presented. The first is an example of one of several strategies for concept formation. The second is a strategy for exploring values and developing empathy. In addition to being adaptable for use with students of different ages and backgrounds, both questioning strategies are applicable across the social studies.

⁴See Hilda Taba, Mary C. Durkin, Jack R. Fraenkel, and Anthony H. McNaughton, *A Teacher's Handbook to Elementary Social Studies*, 2nd edition (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1971).

Concept Formation

A concept is a name (label, symbol) for a group of phenomena with common characteristics (e.g., revolution, metropolis, ethnocentrism). The common characteristics identify members of a particular concept grouping and distinguish them from others. Because concepts are abstractions, students often have difficulty understanding their meaning in a way that enables them to identify examples and use the concepts in forming generalizations or interpreting new data. This difficulty is particularly likely to arise when students are expected to memorize someone else's definition of a concept. Therefore, it is important that students be helped to develop their own concept meanings—definitions in their own words that have meaning for them.⁷

The following questioning strategy, comprised of comprehension and follow-up questions, helps students form concepts by working out meaningful concept definitions from examples of the concept provided by the teacher. To set the stage for the discussion, the teacher introduces the concept name and presents several concept examples and nonexamples (phenomena that are *not* members of the concept group). The examples might be presented in any of several forms, including an oral or written list, a series of pictures, and an array of artifacts. After indicating which items are examples of the concept and which are not, the teacher uses questions to involve students in (1) identifying the distinguishing characteristics of the examples (what they have in common that differentiates them from the nonexamples), (2) formulating a definition of the concept grouping that accounts for the previously identified characteristics, (3) applying their definition to distinguish new examples and nonexamples of the concept, and/or identifying additional examples of the concept. This questioning strategy for concept formation is outlined in the following, three-part series of questions:

Initiation

1. What do these examples of (the concept) have in common?
 - a. How are they different from the nonexamples?
 - b. What else do you notice?

Development

2. Using the common characteristics of (the concept) that you have identified, how would you define (the concept)?
 - a. How well does our definition fit the examples?
How well does it exclude the nonexamples?
 - b. How can we modify our definition to better fit the examples and exclude the nonexamples?

Synthesis

3. Which of these are examples of (the concept), according to our definition?
 - a. Why do you believe this is (is not) an example?
 - b. What are some other examples of (the concept)?

This concept formation questioning strategy could be employed, for example, to guide middle-school students' development of the concept "technology." After writing the concept name on the chalkboard, the teacher might display a series of pictures that do and do not illustrate technology and indicate which are examples of tech-

nology and which are not. Illustrations of technology might include a factory assembly line, a student sharpening a pencil, a rock concert, and a traffic light. Nonexamples might include a deserted beach, a dog barking at a squirrel, and two people talking to one another. Then, the teacher would use the questioning strategy suggested above, modifying the questions to fit the students' vocabulary and adding follow-up questions as necessary.

This questioning strategy can be adapted to help students develop pairs of concepts such as prejudice and discrimination, democracy and dictatorship, goods and services. Examples would represent one concept or the other, and students would develop definitions of each concept.

Exploring Values and Developing Empathy

This questioning strategy is intended to help students understand their own and others' feelings and some of the reasons why people act as they do. By identifying values, recognizing different values, and seeing how values influence behavior, students can develop greater empathy for other individuals and groups as well as increased self-understanding. This sensitivity and knowledge contribute significantly to social and decision-making skills.

To use this type of strategy effectively requires soliciting a range of responses to each question and accepting students' ideas and beliefs in a nonjudgmental manner. This questioning strategy combines comprehension, personal belief/experience, and follow-up questions. It purposely does not include judgment questions since the intent is to encourage value exploration and empathy, not value competition.

Discussion is introduced with the presentation of an appropriate stimulus situation or reference to one previously studied. The stimulus might portray individuals or groups in either historical or contemporary settings. Pictures, diary excerpts, music, case studies, newspaper and magazine articles are just some of the media that can be used to provide focus and stimulate interest. After students observe (read, view, and/or listen to) the stimulus situation, the teacher uses questions to involve students in (1) describing the situation, (2) interpreting the probable feelings of the individuals or groups just described, (3) inferring others' reasons for their actions and apparent values, (4) identifying or hypothesizing their own feelings and behavior in similar circumstances, inferring probable reasons for their behavior and the values it reflects, (5) comparing and contrasting their own and others' actions and values, and (6) forming tentative generalizations about the variations among and relationships between values and behavior.⁸

This questioning strategy for exploring values and developing empathy is outlined in the following six-part series of questions. Part 1 initiates the discussion, while parts 2 through 4 guide the development phase, and parts 5 and 6 provide for synthesis.

Initiation

1. What happened (is happening) to the people in this situation?
 - a. What else did you notice?
 - b. What is (one of the persons or groups in the situation just described) doing?

Development

2. How do you suppose (a person or group) feels?

⁷This questioning strategy draws from Taba, *op cit.*, and Louis Raths, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney B. Simon, *Values and Teaching* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1966).

- a. Why do you believe (the person or group) would feel that way?
- b. How do you suppose (another person or group) feels?
3. What do you suppose their reasons might be for doing (saying) that?
 - a. What do these reasons suggest about what is important to them?
 - b. What is another possibility?
4. If something like this happened to you, how did (would) you feel?
 - a. What did (would) you do?
 - b. What does this show about what you believe is important?

Synthesis

5. How do your own values and behavior compare with those of the people (groups) in this situation?
 - a. In what ways are they similar?
 - b. How are they different?
6. What might we conclude about people's values and behavior in situations like this?

While follow-up questions are used extensively in this strategy to elicit, develop, and examine a range of ideas, only a few were included in the outline to serve as examples. In an actual discussion, there would be many more follow-up questions. For example, if students were reluctant to share personal experiences and express their feelings, the teacher might rephrase the questions in part 4 as follows: If something like this has happened to someone you know, how did he or she feel? What did your friend do?

This questioning strategy could be employed in numerous social studies contexts. Consider the following situations and media examples: excerpts from the diaries of individuals living through the Civil War (e.g., northern and southern soldiers, slaves and freedmen), photographs of two students being questioned by police officers, film of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, a newspaper account of a family's home being destroyed by fire, TV news film of a civil rights demonstration, a written description of the building of a medieval cathedral, and song lyrics such as "I Am Woman" and "Cherokee Nation." In addition, a role-playing or simulation activity could provide an effective opener for this type of discussion.

These questioning strategies—for concept formation and for exploring values and developing empathy—are just two examples selected from numerous alternatives. Sources of other questioning strategies are noted in the bibliography. In addition to modifying these strategies to suit your students, personal style, and instructional goals, consider creating your own special-purpose questioning strategies.

Social Studies Discussion Guidelines

Additional considerations related to stimulating and maintaining student participation in productive dialogue involve moderating, pacing, and reacting to student responses.

Moderating

Moderating discussion involves using questions to encourage broad participation and to focus attention on key ideas. Directing questions to students who do not volunteer and using questions that allow for several responses are ways to broaden participation so that a discussion is not dominated by a few eager students. Comprehension

questions that call for examples and personal belief/experience questions are particularly appropriate for this purpose. For example: What are some propaganda techniques that you have seen in TV commercials? Eddie, what might be another example? How do you feel about commercials where celebrities sell cars or aspirin?

Redirecting students' questions to the group and requesting that students respond to each other's ideas also encourage wider participation. Comprehension and follow-up questions are often used for this purpose. For example: Where can we find an answer to Helen's question? What might be some consequences of George's suggestion? What can we add to what Carl J. has said?

For any number of reasons, even the best planned discussions occasionally ramble or bog down. At these times the teacher might revive the discussion by focusing attention on key ideas or goals. For example: Which of the alternatives that we have listed on the chalkboard can we eliminate as being impractical? What further information should we have before making a decision? If you had to select just one of these alternatives, which would be your choice?

Note that these guidelines for facilitating discussion are intended to sustain a productive dialogue by actively involving most, if not all, students. The teacher is neither passive nor dominant. The teacher's role is a combination of planner, initiator, moderator, and sometimes provocateur, but not of primary participant. Discussions are unlikely to be effective (or remain discussions) when the teacher does most of the talking.

Pacing

Pacing refers to the number of questions used and the length of time provided for students to respond to a question. A large number of questions asked in rapid succession might be acceptable when using memory questions in a recitation to assess students' recall of factual information. However, in a discussion, fewer questions are used, and the majority are usually follow-up questions. Presumably, comprehension, creative expression, and judgment questions worth raising are also worth developing. For example: How might our lives be different today if the automobile had never been invented? Subsequent teacher questions would be follow-up questions to request elaboration, clarification, or justification, to encourage broader participation and additional ideas, or, if necessary, to refocus the discussion.

Creating a discussion atmosphere in which students have sufficient time to explore ideas and formulate thoughtful responses requires slowing the pace of questioning as well as using fewer questions. We often find silence uncomfortable during a discussion and consequently pause only briefly after asking a question. Instead of allowing students time to consider a question and possible responses, we tend to expect an instant answer. If there is none, we usually repeat or rephrase the question, call on another student, answer the question ourselves, or ask a different question. In a large-scale study, it was found that, on the average, teachers waited less than one second for students to respond before moving on.¹ One second obviously is not enough time for comparing, hypothesizing, judging, or engaging in other information processing. Such a rapid pace encourages superficial re-

¹ Mary B. Rowe, "Wait-Time and Rewards as Instructional Variables: Their Influence on Language, Logic, and Fate Control," paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Research in Science Teaching, April 1972.

sponding and discourages all but the quickest students.

The same study also showed that providing more time for students to respond makes a difference in both the quantity and quality of student participation. When teachers paused from three to five seconds after asking a question, (a) more students responded, including those who had been considered "slow," (b) students gave longer responses and displayed more inferential and creative thinking, (c) more students volunteered responses and raised questions, and (d) student-student interaction increased. While silence may be discomforting at first, waiting at least three to five seconds seems well worthwhile and not overly long.

Reacting

How teachers react to student responses also affects the quantity and quality of student participation in discussion and, therefore, the effectiveness of the discussion. Teacher reactions can encourage or discourage responding and learning. Even clearly phrased, provocative questions will not stimulate productive discussion if teacher reactions to students' responses suggest boredom, disappointment, or disapproval.

Reactions to student responses can be characterized as acceptance or nonacceptance. Accepting reactions communicate positive regard and tend to encourage participation and favorable attitudes toward oneself, social studies, and learning in general. Reactions that are usually perceived as accepting include acknowledgement, praise, using student ideas, and follow-up questions. In contrast, nonaccepting reactions communicate low regard and tend to discourage participation and favorable attitudes. Reactions that are usually perceived as nonaccepting include ignoring, repeating or rephrasing a student's response, rejecting, and criticizing.

Most of these reactions can be nonverbal as well as verbal. When verbal and nonverbal reactions are contradictory, the nonverbal reaction usually outweighs the verbal one. For example, if we react to a student's response by frowning and saying "OK," the student will more than likely interpret the reaction as nonacceptance.

Some examples of accepting reactions are

Acknowledgement: 1. "OK" 2. "um-hmm" 3. "yes" 4. nodding

Praise: 1. "good idea" 2. "fine" 3. "That's a very clear summary." 4. "I like that example."

Using Student Ideas: 1. "That point fits in with what Larry was saying about . . ." 2. "I hadn't thought about that possibility; it makes sense in terms of . . ." 3. Writing the student's response on the chalkboard.¹⁰

While verbal praise is often intended to reinforce student participation and learning, it is likely to be ineffective, or possibly even counterproductive, when it is misused. The potential reinforcing value of teacher praise is diminished when a particular word or phrase, such as "good" or "that's right," is used continually. Because the teacher's reaction is automatic, it soon becomes meaningless. Dramatic or elaborate praise also tends to be self-defeating. An extended expression of approval is distracting because it focuses attention on the teacher and a single student, thereby interrupting the flow of discussion.

While verbally echoing or rephrasing a student's response is often perceived as nonacceptance (because it suggests that students need listen only to the teacher and not to each other or that the teacher's words are better than the students'), writing out a student's response tends to communicate that it is important and merits further consideration.

and discouraging student-student interaction. Finally, indiscriminate use of praise, regardless of the quality of a student's response, encourages tangential or partial responding.

Praise is more likely to be effective when it is moderate, specific, and brief. Instead of excessive, global judgments, praise should communicate positive regard for a particular effort or performance and focus on the process more than the substance of a student's response. For example: "You seem to have thought that out carefully." "I like your way of explaining that."

Acknowledgement and use of student ideas are likely to be more effective than praise in promoting productive discussion. Acknowledgement communicates acceptance while minimizing the possibility of interrupting discussion or discouraging student-student interaction. It is also more appropriate than praise in a discussion where students are expected to examine alternatives and reach their own conclusions. If the teacher passes judgment on most or all student responses, a discussion can become a contest in which students vie for teacher approval rather than direct their energies toward reaching the discussion goal.

Using student ideas appears to have strong motivating effects. Referring to student ideas, relating, applying, or building on them, communicates acceptance and positive regard. A crucial element is that we are not just saying that we like our students' ideas but are actually using them by incorporating them into the ongoing discussion.

In the situation where a student does not respond or says, "I don't know," using follow-up questions that rephrase or simplify the original question or that provide a cue communicates the expectation that the student is able to respond. The teacher shows positive regard by staying with the student instead of giving up and moving on. In contrast, providing an answer or calling on another student—especially asking, for example, "Who can help Robert?"—communicates lack of confidence in the student's ability to respond.

... ..

Throughout this booklet, a major goal has been to show how questioning can be used to help students develop social studies knowledge and skills. Questions are tools for both teachers and students. Whether they are used productively is largely up to us. It is hoped that teachers will try out the previous suggestions and seek additional ideas from other sources, such as those offered below.

Selected Bibliography

In addition to the references cited in the footnotes, the following sources offer practical suggestions and examples for classroom implementation.

Fraenki, Jack R. *Helping Students Think and Value*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973. Describes and illustrates several questioning strategies which are similar to those in Taba's *Handbook*.

Grossier, Philip. *How To Use the Fine Art of Questioning*. N.Y.: Teachers Practical Press, 1964. A comprehensive source, particularly useful for guidelines on phrasing effective questions.

Kownslar, Allan O. (ed). *Teaching American History: The Quest for Relevancy*. Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1974. Sample lessons in this NCSS yearbook illustrate varied uses of questions and different questioning

- strategies. The section authored by Francis P. Hunkins, "What To Ask and When," is designed to encourage and guide student as well as teacher questioning.
- Oliver, Donald W., and Newmann, Fred M. *Taking a Stand: A Guide to Clear Discussion of Public Issues*. Columbus: American Education Publications, 1967. Designed for student use, but very helpful to teachers in distinguishing different types of discussions and identifying techniques for facilitating discussion.
- Sanders, Norris M. "New Questioning Strategies Built into United States History Textbooks," *Social Education*, 1971, 35: 770-775. Illustrates recent changes in textbook questions and explores implications for teaching and learning. For an earlier review, see O. L. Davis, Jr. and Francis P. Hunkins, "Textbook Questions: What Thinking Processes Do They Foster?", *Peabody Journal of Education*, 1966, 43, 285-292.
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- Sweeney, Jo A., and Parsons, James B. "Teacher Preparation and Models for Teaching Controversial Social Issues," in Raymond H. Muessig (ed.), *Controversial Issues in the Social Studies: A Contemporary Perspective*. Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1975. Shows how questions are used within a social issues model; also describes several alternative approaches to examining controversial social issues in which questions play a key role.
- Taba, Hilda, Durkin, Mary C., Fraenkel, Jack R., and McNaughton, Anthony H. *A Teacher's Handbook to Elementary Social Studies* (2nd edition). Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1971. Describes and illustrates varied questioning strategies appropriate for use with secondary as well as elementary students.

NOTE: This *How To Do It* Notebook Series 2, designed for a loose-leaf binder, provides a practical and useful source of classroom methods and techniques for elementary and secondary social studies teachers. The titles now available in Series 2 are: *Improving Reading Skills in Social Studies*, *Effective Use of Films in Social Studies Classrooms*, *Reach for a Picture*, and *Using Questions in Social Studies*. Price per copy, \$1.00. Quantity discounts: 10-49 copies, 10%; 50-99 copies, 15%; 100 or more copies, 20%. Payment must accompany all orders except those on official institutional purchase order forms. Order from the NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES, 1515 Wilson Boulevard, Suite #1, Arlington, Virginia 22209.